

**UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
BATTLE MOUNTAIN DISTRICT**

**Serial Number: N-091090, 091092, 091093
EA# DOI-BLM-NV-B010-2013-0024-EA**

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

I have reviewed Environmental Assessment (EA) DOI-BLM-NV-B010-2013-0024-EA, dated August 2013. After consideration of the environmental effects as described in the EA, and incorporated herein, I have determined that the proposed action with the project design specifications, including design features and mitigation measures identified in the EA, will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment and that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required to be prepared.

I have determined that the proposed action is in conformance with the approved Shoshone-Eureka Resource Management Plan, and is consistent with the plans and policies of neighboring local, county, state, tribal and federal agencies and governments.

This finding and conclusion is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), both with regard to the context and the intensity of impacts described in the EA.

Context

In April 2012, the Battle Mountain District Office of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) received an application from Arizona Nevada Tower Corporation (ANTC) for three rights-of-way (ROW) to construct and operate three communication sites on public land in Lander, Nye and Esmeralda Counties.

The project is funded by a federal grant. ANTC proposes to construct three new telecommunications facilities (Hickison Summit, Kingston, and Dyer). Each site would consist of a steel lattice tower supporting microwave dishes. Ancillary equipment shelters would be installed adjacent to the towers. New access would be required at Kingston and Dyer.

ANTC already holds several telecommunications site leases on public lands managed by BLM's Las Vegas, Pahrump, Tonopah, Carson City and Ely district and field offices. The proposed project would enlarge this communication network within BLM's Battle Mountain District and provide more reliable cellular phone services to rural areas, link hospitals and other medical facilities to telemedicine capabilities and upgrade service for rural schools and libraries.

The portions of the proposal located on public lands will include:

- Hickison Summit (Lander County) in the north end of Toquima Range overlooking Monitor Valley and US Highway 50:
 - Consisting of an unfenced 100-foot by 100-foot square area (10,000 square feet; approx. .23 acres) with an unlighted, 100-foot-tall, self-supporting steel lattice tower; a 10-foot by 26-foot radio equipment shelter, a 4-foot by 6-foot concrete pad supporting a back-up propane generator, two 3-foot by 6-foot concrete pads supporting one 500 gallon propane tank each, and an approximately 20-foot by 30-foot solar field consisting of 40 photovoltaic solar panels and batteries.
- Kingston (Nye County) immediately northwest of the intersection of Nevada State Route 376 and an un-named road just north of Old Decker Road in the Big Smoky Valley:
 - Consisting of a barbed-wire-topped, 6-foot-high chain link-fenced 100-foot by 100-foot square area (10,000-foot-square; 0.23 acre). Enclosed would be a 120-foot-tall, self-supporting steel lattice tower and an 8-foot by 16-foot equipment shelter and meter bank resting on two concrete footers. A 20-foot wide by 210-foot long (.1 acre) access road and 200-foot long overhead or buried power line would connect the site to existing power. New separate disturbance associated with the power line would be 800 square feet (.018 acre). Total new disturbance would be about .35 acres.
- Dyer (Esmeralda County) along the Von Schmidt Line immediately southwest of the Dyer settlement and Nevada State Route 264:
 - Consisting of a fenced 100-foot by 100-foot square area (10,000 square feet; approx. .23 acres). Contained within would be a self-supporting 195 foot tall steel lattice tower and 10 foot by 16 foot radio equipment shelter with meter bank and two concrete footers. Access would be via a new 20 foot wide by 100 foot long dirt road (.046 acres) spurring from an existing two-track passing southeast of the site. A new 20 foot wide by 225 foot long (.1 acre) electric service corridor would run along the proposed road from a nearby power line to the facility's northeast corner. Total disturbance would be .38 acres.

Construction timing would occur, to the extent feasible, outside of bird nesting seasons (1 March-31 July for raptors and 1 April-31 July for other species).

All construction related vehicles would be pressure washed to remove extraneous plant matter (e.g., noxious and invasive weeds) prior to entering a project site. An approved weed barrier fabric would be placed on the site's footprint and covered with four to six inches of 'Type 2' crushed rock to discourage weed establishment. A water truck would be on-site to control dust generated during site preparation.

Natural color schemes would be used to reduce contrast between the facilities and surrounding landscapes.

Intensity

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

The EA considered both beneficial and adverse impacts of the ROW. The proposal would result in new, reliable, cellular and internet services to three under-served rural communities. The proponent's objective is to expand existing microwave and radio network systems to support current and future operational needs across Northern Nevada. Improved services would benefit both local residents and travelers by increasing range and ease of access to these modern communications channels. It will not significantly complicate or otherwise affect the management of other nearby existing ROWs and there are no other currently proposed developments at these locations.

Adverse impacts of the proposed ROW are minimal, as described in the EA.

None of the environmental consequences discussed in detail in Chapter 4 of the EA are considered significant.

2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health and safety.

The effects of the proposed action on public health and safety are considered to be positive. Locally expanded communication capabilities fostered by the proposed facilities would contribute positively to human well-being. New, project associated communication capabilities would initiate a variety of business, education and social opportunities presently unavailable in the project areas.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity of historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

The location of the Proposed Action area was surveyed for cultural resources. Reports describing the cultural and historical material located at the sites have been submitted to and accepted by the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office. The materials have been determined ineligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places; no further mitigation of the sites is anticipated.

The proposed action is not located near any park lands, prime or unique farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers or Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs).

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

The proposed action is not expected to be controversial because it is needed to provide enhanced and upgraded, reliable communications and internet services to currently underserved rural communities. Much of the construction would occur alongside existing ROWs, adjacent to existing disturbance and cause minimal or temporary effects.

A letter providing opportunity for comments on the proposal and EA was mailed to those individuals and holders of adjacent rights-of-way or permits. A notice of availability of the EA was also placed on the Battle Mountain District website. The comment period ran for 15 days until August 9, 2013.

Two comments were received from the general public in support of the proposed project. One comment was received from the Duckwater Shoshone Tribe in support of the proposed project. One comment was received from Nevada Department of Wildlife in support of the proposed project with perch mitigation suggestion. None of these comments identified any significant new issues. The full text of the comments and the BLM's responses have been provided in an appendix in the EA.

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

There are no known effects of the proposed action identified in the EA which are considered to be uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. Similar telecommunications facilities have been constructed previously on the Battle Mountain District and other districts throughout the BLM and the anticipated effects are well understood.

6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

The proposed action is necessary to upgrade and support enhanced telecommunications in the surrounding rural communities for each proposed site. Rights-of-way for communication sites and associated equipment, such as generators and propane tanks and facilities, are common authorizations under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act.

The proposed action has been found to cause no significant effects to the environment when appropriate design features and mitigation measures are applied and does not represent a decision in principle about future considerations. Any future actions on public lands would be analyzed on their own merits and carried out, or not, independently of the action currently proposed.

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.

Past, present and reasonably foreseeable future actions have been considered in the Cumulative Impacts analysis in the EA (Section 4.5). The Cumulative Impacts analysis examined all of the other appropriate actions and determined that the proposed action would not have significant cumulative impacts or incrementally contribute to significant cumulative impacts.

While the proposed action is a "stand alone" action it is related to certain other current and past actions.

The Hickison site already consists of other communication site leases of similar characteristics and existing ROWs. The Dyer and Kingston sites already consist of other ROWs.

There are no known future actions in the area however, for any actions that might be proposed in the future, further environmental analysis, including assessment of cumulative impacts, would be required prior to authorizing surface disturbing activities.

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources.

There are no adverse effects on the districts, sites, highways, structures or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

The proposed action would require appropriate mitigation of cultural resources, but no cumulative impacts to the cultural resources are expected as a result of this action. There is a prehistoric assemblage at the Dyer site that was determined to be ineligible for the National Register. Recording and describing the presence of this assemblage constitutes the required mitigation. The cadastrals located outside of the Hickison Summit site would not be affected.

9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

No threatened or endangered species were surveyed at or near any of the three sites.

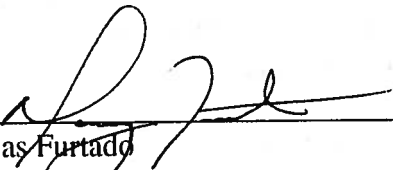
Both the Hickison and Kingston sites lie within 'suitable sagebrush habitat' for greater sage grouse, considered a BLM Sensitive Species, and an active sage grouse lek lies approximately 2.25 miles west of the Hickison Summit site. The lek closest to the Kingston site is about fifteen miles east of the site on the opposite side of Big Smoky Valley. The Dyer site lies well outside of suitable sage grouse habitat, with the closest known sage grouse lek more than fifteen miles north.

Construction of the Hickison Summit facility would cause direct loss of 0.23 acres of greater sage grouse habitat and construction of the Kingston facility would cause loss of 0.35 acres of possible sage grouse habitat.

A sage-grouse survey was performed during the sage-grouse strutting season which identified Hickison Summit area as 'essential/irreplaceable' greater sage grouse habitat. Stipulations are included in the ROW grant to minimize impacts to these species which include seasonal work restrictions, pre-construction wildlife surveys, and subsequent avoidance if species are observed.

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

The proposed action will not violate or threaten to violate any Federal, State, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.



Douglas Furtado
District Manager
Battle Mountain District

8/30/13
Date